

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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FM AMEMBASSY SOFIA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1446

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E.O. 11652: NA

TAGS: ABLD, BU

SUBJECT: BUILDING SITE FOR NEW CHANCERY IN SOFIA

REF: A) SOFIA 1325; B) STATE 162528

1. SUMMARY. BULGARIAN GOVT HAS APPARENTLY DECIDED TO CONCENTRATE ALL FUTURE EMBASSY CHANCERIES AND RESIDENCES IN ONE DISTRICT; AND FOR THIS PURPOSE THEY HAVE NOW CHOSEN AN AREA WHICH IS CERTAINLY MORE ATTRACTIVE THAN ANY THAT HAVE BEEN SHOWN TO US PREVIOUSLY, BUT IT IS DIAMETRICALLY OPPOSITE FROM WHERE MAJOR EMBASSIES NOW ARE. AMBASSADOR SAID USG DOES NOT LIKE TO BE CONFINED IN A DIPLOMATIC GHETTO, BUT HE WOULD FORWARD DESCRIPTION OF THE NEW AREA TO WASHINGTON WITHOUT RECOMMENDATION. WE RECOMMEND ANOTHER HIGH-LEVEL EFFORT TO GET A BUILDING LOT IN THE EASTERN SECTION OF SOFIA, BUT IF THIS FAILS WE MAY HAVE TO ACCEPT THE BEST AVAILABLE LOT IN THE NEW DIPLOMATIC CENTER. END SUMMARY.

2. AMB ILIEV, DIRECTOR OF DIPLOMATIC SERVICES, INVITED AMBASSADOR JULY 8 FOR DISCUSSION OF NEW CHANCERY SITE. HE REFERRED TO AMBASSADOR'S CONVERSATION WITH FOREIGN MINISTER JUNE 21 (REF A) AND SAID HE HAD INSTRUCTIONS TO BE HELPFUL. HE NOW HAD NEW AND VERY DESIRABLE SITE WHICH HE WISHED TO SHOW US IMMEDIATELY; BUT SINCE IT WAS RAINING CATS AND DOGS WE POSTPONED INSPECTION TO JULY 9. CONVERSATION DISCLOSED THAT ILIEV HAD NO SITE TO OFFER IN AREA WHICH WE PREFERRED BUT THAT NEW ZONING HAD OPENED UP A RESIDENTIAL AREA IN WHICH MFA INTENDED TO CONCENTRATE

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ALL FUTURE RESIDENCES AND CHANCERIES.

3. INSPECTION BY AMBASSADOR AND ADMIN OFFICER NEXT DAY DISCLOSED THAT THE AREA WHICH WE CALL NO. 7 (ON BORJANA STREET ABOUT ONE-HALF MILE FROM 9TH SEPTEMBER BLVD, A MAJOR ARTERY LEADING OUT OF TOWN) IS INDEED PREFERABLE TO LAST TWO SITES OFFERED (NOS. 5 AND 6) WHICH HAD BEEN SO DISMAL THAT WE DIDN'T EVEN REPORT THEM (THEY WERE ON SLIVNICA BLVD AND AT INTERSECTION OF STOYAN LEPOEV AND KONSTANTIN VELIDKOV). THE NEW AREA IS NOT A SLUM BUT RESIDENTIAL, WITH PLEASANT GARDENS NEAR PRESENT DIPLOMATIC CLUB, BUT DIAMETRICALLY ACROSS TOWN FROM THE AREA WHERE THE NEW FOREIGN MINISTRY WILL BE AND WHERE THE SOVIET, BRITISH, FRENCH AND WEST GERMAN EMBASSIES ARE LOCATED. BULGARIANS OF COURSE SAY, AS THEY HAD SAID ABOUT OTHER SITES, THAT CITY PLANS EXTENSIVE DEVELOPMENT OF TRAFFIC ARTERIES, CIVIC AND RECREATIONAL FACILITIES, AND COMMUNICATIONS. THERE IS AT PRESENT A BUS LINE SERVICING THE AREA, AND UTILITIES ARE AVAILABLE.

4. AMBASSADOR MADE THESE POINTS TO ILIEV: (A) USG DOES NOT LIKE HAVING ITS CHANCERY CONFINED IN A DIPLOMATIC "GHETTO"; (B) WE DO NOT EXPECT SAME TREATMENT AS USSR WHICH HAS LARGER INTERESTS IN BULGARIA BUT DO EXPECT SAME TREATMENT AS UK, FRANCE, FRG AND JAPAN, NONE OF WHICH ARE IN A GHETTO AND ALL OF WHICH ARE IN EASTERN SECTION OF CITY; (C) WHILE BULGARIAN EMBASSY IN WASHINGTON IS FREE TO LOOK FOR SITES ANYWHERE, WE ARE DEPENDENT ON BULGARIAN AUTHORITIES MAKING SOMETHING SUITABLE AVAILABLE TO US. WE NEED ILIEV'S HELP AND HAD HOPED INTERVENTION WITH FOREIGN MINISTER WOULD STRENGTHEN HIS HAND WITH THE ZONING AUTHORITY. AMBASSADOR SAID HE WOULD REPORT THE NEW SITE TO WASHINGTON BUT COULD NOT RECOMMEND IT.

5. ILIEV REVEALED THAT REASON THE SITE WE HAD ORIGINALLY SELECTED, NEAR FESTIVAL HALL (NO. 4), HAD BEEN WITHDRAWN DUE TO REZONING, WAS THAT GOB HAD DECIDED TO CONCENTRATE ALL FUTURE CHANCERIES IN ONE AREA WHICH HE SAID WOULD MAKE IT EASIER TO PROVIDE ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES. HE SAID IF UK, FRANCE ETC. WERE LOOKING FOR REAL ESTATE NOW, THEY WOULD RECEIVE IDENTICAL TREATMENT AS US. HE GAVE NO ENCOURAGEMENT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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MENT WHATEVER THAT SITE IN EASTERN PARTY OF CITY WOULD BE OFFERED; NEITHER, HOWEVER, WHEN PRESSED BY AMBASSADOR WOULD HE COMPLETELY FORECLOSE SUCH A POSSIBILITY.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION: BELIEVE WE SHOULD MAKE FURTHER ATTEMPT TO GET A SITE IN THE EASTERN SECTION OF SOFIA, AND THEN REASSESS THE SITUATION. IF GOB IS SERIOUS ABOUT CONCENTRATING ALL NEW EMBASSIES IN ONE

AREA, WE MAY HAVE TO TRY FOR THE BEST POSSIBLE SITE IN THE PROPOSED BORJANA AREA, WHICH IS ABOUT FIFTEEN MINUTES FROM CENTER OF SOFIA. OUR POSITION IS NOT STRENGTHENED BY THE FACT THAT ZONING CONSIDERATION (OR THEIR EQUIVALENT) ARE ALSO HOLDING UP SIGNING OF CONTRACT FOR THE LOT IN WASHINGTON PREFERRED BY THE BULGARIAN GOVT (REF B). NOTE-WORTHY HOWEVER THAT ILIEV DID NOT BRING UP THE WASHINGTON PROBLEM. AMB NEVERTHELESS TOLD HIM STATE DEPT TRYING TO BE HELPFUL WITHIN LIMITS OF ITS POSSIBILITIES.

7. WE HAVE HELD UP THIS MESSAGE PENDING RECEIPT OF INFORMATION ON PRICE OF ONE HECTARE (TWO ACRE) LOT, WHICH WE WERE PROMISED FOR JULY 12. WE WILL FORWARD THAT INFORMATION AS SOON AS RECEIVED. IF THE BULGARIANS FIND IT IMPOSSIBLE TO SOLVE THEIR DIFFICULTY WITH THE CATHEDRAL PROPERTY IN WASHINGTON, IT IS YET POSSIBLE THAT WE MAY BE ABLE WORK OUT "CASHLESS EXCHANGE" OF USG PROPERTY IN WASHINGTON FOR DESIRABLE BUILDING SITE IN SOFIA. FROM POINT OF VIEW OF ACCESSIBILITY BORJANA AREA IS NOT EVEN SECOND BEST, BUT IT HAS SOME ATTRACTIVE FEATURES AND IN ANY CASE MAY BE WHAT WE WILL HAVE TO SETTLE FOR. MEANWHILE HOWEVER WE WOULD PROPOSE TO HAVE ANOTHER GO AT THE FOREIGN MINISTER, FOR THE ISSUE IS NOT WHAT IS AVAILABLE UNDER PRESENT ZONING BUT THE ZONING ITSELF.
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